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THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN EAST TIMOR:

its lone struggle for justice

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Introduction

> Despite Vatican realpolitik and attempt by the Indonesian Catholic Church to avoid the issue, the church in East Timor has become a major focus for opposition to the Indonesian occupation during the 1980s[1]

The tragic history of East Timor since 1975 has been a prime example of immorality and duplicity in international relations. Governments of states claiming to be defenders of democratic ideals and respect for human rights have cynically ignored the plight of a defenceless people, victims of brutal aggression and oppression by an authoritarian military dictatorship, in violation of international norms and legality. The unprincipled 'realpolitik' of such governments, the Australian one included, has been motivated by their aim to avoid tensions in their relations with the Indonesian rulers, so as to protect economic and strategic interests.

The Catholic Church has also had an important role in the East Timor conflict. It has, however, not played this role in unison. On the contrary, the position taken by the East Timor church contrasts strongly with the 'realpolitik' of the Vatican, the church in Indonesia, and that -at least until recently- of the Australian church. While the East Timorese church has come to the defence of its people, others have deferred to the Indonesian government, seeking to protect interests in Indonesia.

This essay will look at the role of the Catholic Church in the East Timor conflict, arising from Indonesian military aggression of the former Portuguese Southeast Asian colony in 1975, and its subsequent occupation and forced annexation as a province of Indonesia.

The essay will first review the historical background of Portuguese Timor, focussing particularly on Church missionary history. The role of the Vatican, and of Pope John Paul II, in the current conflict will be examined next, followed by reference to the position of the Churches of the countries with biggest stakes in the East Timor issue. In conclusion, it will be seen that far from upholding the basic principles of Christian doctrine, and international norms, most Churches, with the exception of the Church of East Timor, have sought accommodation with Indonesia. In doing so they have tended to ignore the prophetic roles ascribed by the Gospel.

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[1] Gunn p 158 citing John Taylor, 'Indonesia's forgotten war :the hidden history of East Timor' (Zed, London,1983, p 157). Gunn adds: the heroic role of the clergy in documenting human rights abuses, defending peoples rights and in publicising East Timor internationally.

Timor Historical background

Political history

After liberating themselves from Islamic domination, the Iberic imperial powers, Portugal and Spain embarked in an expansionist course in the 15th century. Unlike the later northern European imperial powers which succeeded them, they applied themselves with great zeal to the propagation of the faith, while expanding their mercantilist domains. In fact trade as well as carrying out a crusade against Islam were the twin objectives of Iberic expansion[2]. However, the medieval crusade motive soon weakened in favour of commerce and colonisation[3].

Following the capture of Malacca in 1511, and commencement of trade voyages to the Molucca 'spice islands', Portuguese seafarers also started visiting the Lesser Sunda islands, the south easternmost part of what is now the Indonesian archipelago, near the Australian continent. Their principal objective was trade in sandalwood. Landings in Timor for this purpose began in the early 1520s. Magellan's sole surviving ship, 'Victoria' made the first recorded European visit to the island of Timor in 1521, recording the lively trade of locally extracted sandalwood with China[4].

In 1566 four Portuguese Dominicans sent from the Malacca Diocese, established a settlement on Solor, a few hundred miles to the west of Timor, where they built a fort, the stone 'Fortress Henrique'. It was for many years the meeting place of Portuguese trading with Timor, and had its first governor appointed in 1585. As result of miscegenation, a Catholic community of so-called 'black Portuguese' or 'Toppassers' developed, which eventually controlled the Timorese sandalwood trade out of the Solor colony. While loyal to the King of Portugal in its mounting conflicts with the Netherlands, they did not wholly submit to Portuguese authorities.

The rich maritime trade conducted by Portugal out of Malacca, increasingly attracted Dutch traders in the latter 16th century. As the chartered 'Dutch East India Company'(VOC) they began to challenge Portuguese dominance in insular Southeast Asia in the early 17th century, a process which culminated with their capture of Malacca in 1641. Dutch challenge to Portuguese control of the rich sandalwood trade in the Lesser Sundas led to the first Portuguese loss to the Netherlands, Solor, in 1613. The capture of Solor by the VOC led to the displacement of the Toppassers to Flores, and their eventual conquest of Timor on behalf of Portugal in 1642, where they settled in Lifau, the present day Oe Cussi. In 1651 the VOC succeeded in overcoming Toppasser resistance and was able to establish a fort at Kupang in West Timor in 1653. From then on the island was to remain politically divided. This reinforced the traditional ethnic divisions, separating the peoples from the eastern and western parts of the island.

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[2] R.O. Winstedt, A history of Malaya, (Kuala Lumpur, Marican, 1982, p 65)

[3] DGE Hall, A History of South East Asia, 3rd ed, (London, Macmillan, 1977, p 239)

[4] Antonio Pigafetta, Magellan's Voyage: a Narrative Account of the First Circumnavigation, (Yale, University Press, New Haven, 1969, p 174, cited in Gunn, A critical View..., p 27

While Toppassers recognised the Portuguese crown and its authorities in Goa and Macao, they insisted on preserving their local autonomy on Timor. After the previously united civilian and church power was separated in 1701, the Portuguese government was only able to appoint its first governor in Timor in Lifau, Oe Cussi Ambeno in 1702. This exacerbated the conflict between white and black Portuguese and the clergy on Timor, until Lifau was abandoned to the Toppassers in 1769. The Portuguese governor moved to Dili, from where control was progressively extended. The Toppassers were able to sustain their autonomy until the 19th century, when they lost to the 'white' Portuguese.

Expansion of Dutch control over the archipelago that was to become the present Republic of Indonesia took place throughout the 17th to the early 20th centuries, while the presence of Portugal progressively contracted. Consolidation of Dutch rule became especially intense after the start of direct colonial rule by the Dutch Crown upon the demise of the VOC in 1801. Predominantly Protestant, and not having experienced Islamic domination, Dutch expansion was not driven by the twin aims of the Portuguese. A profound animosity, going beyond trade rivalry, was thus felt by Portuguese against the Dutch, which lasted throughout their colonial rivalry in the Lesser Sundas into the 20th century. Flores, part of Timor and other adjoining islands were relinquished to the Dutch in 1859. After the loss to the Dutch of the Moluccas, Solor, Malacca and Flores, Timor and Macao remained the only Portuguese colonies east of the Goa settlement in India until the 20th century[5]. The final Dutch Portuguese Treaty of 1904 established guaranteed borders for the Portuguese colony on the eastern half of Timor, including the enclave of Oe Cussi in Dutch western Timor, and the islands of Atauro and Jaco off the eastern Timorese coast.

Consolidation of Portuguese colonial control in Timor was slow. Nicol points out that after 400 years of European contact, by the end of the nineteenth century, "Portuguese colonial rule in Timor was more fictitious than real"[6]. Almost total control was only achieved after the 1913 military suppression of a major tribal uprising.

During the World War II years, Japan occupied Portuguese Timor, violating its neutral status, and used the opportunity to foment opposition to Portuguese colonial rule, as well as stimulating hostilities between native groups supportive of Portugal and groups from the previous Dutch Timor, now conquered in war by Japan together with the rest of the Netherlands East Indies. As a result of post war Indonesian infiltration and the legacy of Japanese war time influence, further challenges to Portuguese rule took place in 1959 and were equally met with force.

The evolution of the administrative status of Timor began at the end of the 19th century. In 1896 a decree made Timor autonomous from Macao, granting it its own political, economic and religious statute. After regaining control of its Timor colony after the defeat of Japan, the Salazar right wing military backed dictatorship of Portugal, which had come to power in 1926, resisted post World War II international trends towards the dismantling of European empires and the emergence of independent states. While Dutch Timor became part of the independent Republic of Indonesia, encompassing the previous Netherlands East Indies, the status of Portuguese Timor changed only in name. In response to international anti-colonial pressures in 1953 the Portuguese government began naming its colonies 'Overseas Provinces'. The Organic Law of Overseas Territories of 1953 gave Timor the distinct status of an 'Overseas Province', a fact not formally declared until 10 years later[7]. Among Portuguese overseas provinces, most of which were in Africa, Portuguese Timor was the farthest, poorest, least developed and least important.

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[5] Goa was invaded by India in 1960, Timor by Indonesia in 1975, and Macao is scheduled to be returned to China in 1999, ending five centuries of Portuguese overseas imperial history.

[6] Nicol, Timor...., p 17

[7] G. Hull, East Timor: just a political question?, (Sydney, Australian Catholic Social Justice

Once Portuguese control became firmly established in the territory's interior in the early 20th century, a coffee plantation sector was developed, which has remained the main export revenue producing commodity until today. At the end of Portuguese rule, efforts had commenced to develop other existing natural wealth sources such as oil and minerals. Up to the last few years of Portuguese rule, the territory was primarily self-funding on the basis of coffee, imports and personal taxes. The small revenues collected did not allow for much development work to be undertaken. The Salazar economic isolationism further discouraged foreign investment, while trade was contained to the empire. Virtually no trade and other exchanges with the surrounding region were allowed. Economic and infrastructural development in Portuguese Timor was thus very low. Only in the very last years of Portuguese colonial rule did the government begin to embark in an active program of infra structural development, building airports and harbours, if few roads. The small local budget began to be subsidised by Lisbon at a time of increasingly expensive colonial wars in Africa[8].

Unlike the rich African Portuguese possessions, poor Timor never succeeded in becoming a settler colony. Metropolitans remained a small minority of the population, being mostly public servants, military, and a small community of political deportees by the Salazar regime. In the pre-World War II years, these comprised the majority of the metropolitan community, which, it needs to be noted was made up of people originating from all over the Portuguese empire, rather than purely from Europe. A relatively large Chinese community also existed, which dominated trade, and whose links with both metropolitans and natives were tenuous. As in all Portuguese colonies, miscegenation between all communities was normal. Increased social status was acquired on the basis of assimilation into Portuguese culture, an objective not sought by most Chinese, and beyond the reach of many rural native people. The Church played a strong role as an acculturation agent into Lusophone culture for both these groups.

Council, Occasional Paper No 11, p 5)

[8] Total government expenditure jumped from US$1.9 million in 1972 to US$7.6 million in 1973 (mostly for road building). Only US$ 159,198 was locally generated. (G. Gunn, A Critical View...., p 38).

The forceful opposition to continued Portuguese colonial presence in Africa by the local populations, led to the lengthy wars which heavily drained Portugal, causing the eventual downfall of Salazar's successor, President Caetano. The end of several decades of right wing conservative authoritarian rule came to Portugal on 25 April 1974, through a coup -the 'Carnation Revolution'- by youthful left-leaning military officers. This brought initial social and political instability to Portugal, followed by profound changes including multi-party democracy, in which the previously suppressed left became prominent. Successor governments proceeded to the dismantling of the empire, granting independence to Portugal's African possessions. Portuguese decolonisation plans in Timor were interfered with by Indonesia, leading to their forceful interruption, followed with the abrupt flight of the Portuguese administration and invasion by the Indonesian military in late 1975. Ignoring weak international protests Indonesia forcefully annexed East Timor as its 27th province in 1976. Indonesia's illegal action has been accompanied by extremely brutal treatment of the East Timorese population. The Indonesian actions over the last 19 years have been widely denounced as genocidal. These events have greatly impacted on the East Timorese Catholic Church.

Church history

Portugal's imperial expansion took place primarily in the eastern hemisphere, in which the King of Portugal had been given exclusive trading rights in newly discovered lands by Pope Alexander VI, and the injunction

> to bring the christian faith to the peoples who inhabit...[these lands and send to them]...wise, god fearing, and virtuous men who will be capable of instructing the indigenous peoples in good morals and in the Catholic faith[9].

The Iberic Christian Kingdoms Portugal and Spain, had thus been given Papal responsibility to emphasise Christianity in their newly discovered and conquered territories, supporting missionary activity and endow bishoprics. Sixteenth century Portuguese missionary activity, like that of Spain, was carried out by the great orders with royal protection, and lead to missionary involvement in political and trade matters[10].

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[9] Stephen Neill, A History of Christian Missions, (Harmondsworth, Penguin 1964, p 141). Referring to three Papal Bulls set forth in May 1493.

After the capture of Malacca, two seafaring Dominican missionaries visited Timor in 1512. Fr Antonio Taveiro OP landed in Mahata, near Oe Cussi, where a church was built. The sending of missionaries was requested from Malacca. By 1556 5,000 native people had been baptised[11]. The setting up of Fortress Henrique in Solor by the Dominicans, the first stable Portuguese presence in the region, was aimed to protect indigenous converts from attack by arab and javanese moslems. Funding came from religious and Malacca christian private sources, as well as from the Portuguese Viceroy in India[12]. Civilian government was at the time entrusted to the missionaries by the King of Portugal.

The creation of the Malacca Diocese in 1558 led to the sending of missionaries to Timor. Jesuits were requested in 1559, and Dominicans followed in 1561 to Solor and Timor. Between 1562 and 1595, Larantuka and Solor became main missionary centres. From 1562 Fr Antonio da Cruz OP regularly visited missionary centres of Bahas, Dili, Lifau and Kupang on Timor. In 1586, five Dominicans came to Solor and Timor. In 1590 Fr Melchior de Antas OP built a church in the kingdom of Mena, and subsequently took a king's son to Malacca for study. He was baptised, and upon his return in 1597 his father and a majority of his subjects were also baptised. A native uprising in Solor and Timor and Solor followed in 1598 while the Portuguese were under attack by the VOC. It resulted in the killing of many Catholics and destruction of Churches.[13]
By 1606 there were 64 missionaries based in Solor and spread throughout neighbouring islands[14].

The Dutch attack on Solor in 1613 took place while most missionaries were visiting Timor. As a result they moved to Larantuka on Flores. Following the request of the King of Kupang to be baptised, a Dominican Fr Luis da Faizao OP came to Kupang in 1630, where he was killed shortly afterwards. Another missionary sent from Larantuka to Silabao at the same time was poisoned by

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[10] S. Neil, A history..., p 177

[11] Gregor Neonbasu SVD, Keadilan dan Perdamaian di Diosis Dili, (Dili, Komisi Komunikasi Social Diosis Dili, 1992, p 59)

[12] Marcel Roger, Timor Oriental, hier la colonisation Portugaise, aujourd'hui la resistance a l'aggression Indonesienne, (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1977, p 17)

[13] G. Neonbasu, Keadilan...., p 62

[14] M. Roger, Timor..., p 18

moslem traders, after baptising the local king and his people and building a church. In 1641 the King of Mena was baptised together with his son and many of his subjects. The Queen of Ambeno Lifau and her sons and daughters followed. Subsequently missionaries were placed in Mena, Ambeno and Amanuban. After the fall of Malacca to the Dutch in 1641 the Bishop sought to move the Portuguese administrative centre to Kupang, later controlled by the Dutch in 1653. Until the abolition of the Malacca Diocese, the bishops were forced to stay away from their episcopal see. Between 1705 and 1743, three of them worked in Timor.

After the formal separation of civilian and church power in 1701, the first Portuguese governor's seat in Timor was established in Lifau in 1702. By 1720 a strong conflict had developed between the governor and the visiting bishop of Malacca, leading to two missionaries being sentenced to death and two churches destroyed. The Holy See then sent Jesuit missionaries to several Timor locations. In 1731 Dominicans from Dili and Batugade led uprisings against the governor with Toppasser assistance. In 1734 the King of Portugal ordered the establishment of Timor's first seminary in Oe Cussi, it was followed by a second one in Manatuto in 1747. In 1750 a Timor missionary became Bishop of Malacca, building a cathedral in Lifau in 1755. Ongoing Toppasser hostilities against the governor climaxed with the destruction of his seat in Oe Cussi, and its transfer to Dili in 1769[15]. Such conflicts, and the general deep decline in mission activity in the world in the 18th century, were greatly detrimental to the Church in Timor and Flores.

Consolidation of Portuguese rule on Timor after 1769 went hand in hand with controlling missionary activity. Initial mission work had centred on the conversion of coastal chiefs and their subjects. The Belu ethnic group of the rugged interior proved difficult to approach until the late 19th century. By 1780 there were over 50 churches in Timor plus many chapels[16]. In 1785 a Dili priest was named Macao Vicar General in Timor. By 1787 he was jailed and deported for inciting the Manatuto King to oppose Portuguese rule. After that, the eviction of Portuguese missionaries severely affected mission work. By 1811 only four churches and three non-Portuguese missionaries remained. By 1834 not a single priest remained on the islands of Flores and Timor, as all members of orders and congregations had been banished from Portugal and her colonies in 1834. A strong anti-clerical mood was to prevail in Portugal until 1874.

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[15] G.Neonbasu, Keadilan....., p 66

[16] ibid., p 66

After the suppression of the diocese of Malacca in 1838, the Catholic population of Flores and Timor, was placed under the archbishop of Goa. The bishop of Goa sent a number of Goanese diocesan priests to Timor[17]. After the transfer of Flores and West Timor to the Netherlands in 1859, the Dutch commenced strong missionary activity on Flores and in parts of West Timor not reserved for Protestant missions, during the anti-clerical period in Portugal. After its end, the Portuguese ruled area of Timor was placed under the Macao diocese in 1874, and in 1875 Father Antonio Medeiros was sent to Timor. In 1877 he was appointed Vicar General and Superior of the Timor Church. Seven missionaries from Portugal and one from China joined him. The following year a program of evangelisation and raising the conditions of life in Timor was started. It began with attention to education and the construction of schools, to which children of the local nobility were admitted.

In 1900 Timor was divided into two Vicariates, a northern one with seat in Lahane, and a southern one given to the Jesuits. The fall of the Portuguese Monarchy and its replacement with an anti-clerical Republic in 1910, which expelled missionaries for 10 years, again inhibited mission activity. After 1920, when Fr. Jose da Costa Nunes was appointed Bishop of Macao and Timor, the building of churches was increased, as was missionary involvement in education, leading to the establishment of the first diocesan seminary at Soibada. It functioned from 1937 until the Japanese occupation in 1942.

Salazar's Concordat and Missionary Agreement with the Vatican in 1940 led to a milestone in Timor history, the establishment of the Diocese of Dili in 1940. D. Jaime Garcia Goulart, its first Apostolic Administrator, appointed in 1941, became Bishop in 1945 after the withdrawal of the Japanese. During the years 1942 to 1945 most religious personnel had been evacuated to Australia. The Soibada seminary reopened in 1948, moved to Dili in 1950, and finally to Dare in

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[17] MPM Muskens, Partner in Nation Building, (Aachen, Missio Aktuell, 1979, p 45). In 1853 about 3,000 Catholics lived on East Flores, and in 1856 over 2,000 Catholics were living in Lifau and eastern Timor.

1951. In 1958 it was taken over by the Jesuits, and functioned until destroyed by the Indonesian invasion in 1975. D. Jaime Garcia Goulart was succeeded by Bishop Jose Joaquim Ribeiro, the last Portuguese Bishop of Dili, who left in 1977, heartbroken by the brutal destruction of East Timorese society under Indonesian occupation.

The Church has been one of the main legacies left by Portugal in East Timor. In modern colonial times, during most of the 20th century, it was a conservative institution which nevertheless was the major agent of acculturation of the people of East Timor into Lusophone culture. Even though native Timorese eventually became the backbone of the Church, local language and culture were totally ignored, creating the perception among the less educated that becoming a Christian entailed becoming culturally Portuguese. Given the high prestige in which religious were held, the first allegiance of Timorese was to the missionaries in the Church rather than to colonial authorities. Village people acknowledged the local priest as a community leader, seeking his protection against the abuses of government authorities and of traditional leaders[18]. Especially through the influence of Jesuit missions, the Church emerged as an agent of social and political change[19]. In its last years it recorded about 10,000 conversions of the animist native population per year. East Timor had, at the time, become a virtual Catholic state. Catholicism was the religion of the leaders and the literate. Educated Timorese were more disciplined in the practice of their faith than most Portuguese[20]. According to the last Portuguese census in 1974, the number of Catholics was 196,570, or roughly 30% of the total population of 659,000[21]. They were served by 44 priests (25 of them native Timorese), 8 brothers and 49 nuns, 37 catechists and 160 teachers. The Diocese had three parishes and eighty mission posts.

Given the lack of international recognition of the annexation of East Timor by Indonesia, the Diocese of Dili has remained directly administered by the Vatican, so as to avoid the political issue of placing it under the Indonesian or Portuguese bishops' conferences. As such, "the Pope is the actual bishop of Dili"[22]. This status has allowed the East Timorese Catholic Church a degree of independence from Jakarta, not enjoyed by any other institution in the territory, enabling it to become a rallying point for the population.

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[18] G. Hull, East Timor..., p 5

[19] G. Gunn, A Critical View..., p 39

[20] J. Dunn, Timor: A People Betrayed, (Milton, Qld., Jacaranda Press, 1983, p 50-1)

[21] ibid., p 39

A Timorese, Mgr Martinho da Costa Lopes, was appointed as Apostolic Administrator in 1977, his increasingly vocal criticism of oppressive Indonesian military actions against his people led to Indonesian pressures on the Vatican for his replacement. This took place in 1983. His replacement, Mgr Carlos Filipe Belo, an East Timorese Salesian, was appointed Apostolic Administrator in 1983, becoming Bishop -as titular of Lorium (Italy)- in 1988. Under his leadership, the East Timorese Church has progressively become one of the main foci of opposition to the abuses of Indonesian rule in East Timor, bringing it into growing tensions with the Indonesian authorities. Neither the Vatican nor the Indonesian Church have clearly come to its support. Support and solidarity from foreign Churches has been limited.

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[22] April 1989 pastoral letter by apostolic administrator of Dili, Mgr Belo. (UCA News, Dispatch No 510, 14/06/89, p 19)

Indonesian Church and political history

Catholic Church history

The Republic of Indonesia is a modern post colonial state which emerged in 1949 from the centralising effect of three centuries of Dutch colonial control over the variety of ethnic populations inhabiting most islands of the archipelago that stretches between the Malay Peninsula and Australia. In the 1990s it was the fourth most populated state, and the one which contains the largest Moslem population in the world. Muskens identifies three cultural-religious main streams discernible in Indonesia: a hard core moslem element which demands an Islamic State for Indonesia, a hard core of nationalists who wish a secular nationalist state, and the greater mass whose views on the issue of religion and the State lie somewhere in-between. An understanding of the place of the Catholic Church in Indonesian society requires an insight into this context[23].

About 88 per cent of Indonesia's approximately 180 million people profess to embrace the Islamic faith, with varying degrees of commitment. Catholics make up less than 3 per cent of the population, or close to 4 million people, and Protestants about 5 per cent[24]. The Catholic Church is the fourth largest in Asia[25]. Catholics comprise a large proportion of the ethnic Chinese sector, which makes up about 4 per cent of the population. This group, while economically dominant is politically very vulnerable. The politically and economically weak population of underdeveloped Eastern Indonesia, numerically small in relation to the country's population, also has a high representation of Catholics. On previously Portuguese colonised islands such as Flores, they numerically dominate by far. These areas, together with parts of the peripheral islands of Sumatra, Irian, Maluku and Kalimantan have also large Protestant populations, making them predominantly Christian. Catholic minorities are also found in Java, the dominant island of Indonesia, particularly in poor rural areas.

Relations between adherents to the various religions, and between members of different ethnicities, have always been delicate since the time in the first half of the 20th century when the notion of a united nation began to emerge among the various groups under Dutch colonial rule. Since independence, ruling elites, drawn from among the various ethnic groups, have always been greatly concerned by threats to national unity. National Unity was a dominant theme during the years of rule by Indonesia's first President, Sukarno, lasting until 1965. The violent political history of this period saw various secessionist attempts which threatened the survival of the state. This survival was also often endangered by strong moslem demands for an Islamic state, yet Sukarno's strong nationalist position was able to prevail, and compromises were found, such as the formulation of the state ideology 'Pancasila' which enabled a tenuous nationalist cohesion to survive at the time Japanese rule collapsed in 1945[26]. Imposition of Islam as the state religion would have destroyed the nationalist project of creating one state out of the former Dutch East Indies. Pancasila has subsequently been invoked to face other threats to national unity, particularly under the harsh military backed rule of President Suharto, who came to power as the result of a violent coup in 1965[27]. All forms of open social conflict, including inter-religious ones, have been severely suppressed since.

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[23] MPM Muskens, Partner in Nation..., p 13

[24] Exchange, 54, December 1989, p 53 citing 'Kompas'

[25] 'Indonesia', Information on Human Development, (Federation of Asian Bishops Conference, Office of Human Development, Vol II, N° 2, February 1984)

The history of Indonesian Catholicism is recent. Earliest historical records mention a small and isolated community of Christians in Sumatra in the second half of the seventh century[28]. At the time the islands were dominated by Hindu and Buddhist Kingdoms, which were progressively weakened by the spread of Islam brought by Arab and Indian traders, particularly after the 13th century. Islamic ascendancy was only contained, primarily by military means, after the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century, giving rise to a legacy of mistrust and conflict which lasts to the present time.

While the Portuguese crown actively sponsored missionary activity, the Dutch concentrated on trading, and their presence in the archipelago in the 17th and 18th centuries. The work of Catholic religious was then almost totally directed at Europeans living in major urban trade centres. In the 19th century, particularly during the "heyday of colonialism" between 1858 to 1914, strong and highly successful Protestant missionary activity among moslems took place in the Netherlands East Indies[29]. Catholics, had a hard time in the first half of the century. Between 1809 and 1859 only thirty three priests reached the Indies, out of which only seven remained by the end of this period. They worked mainly with European residents[30]. Only after Flores and neighbouring islands were ceded to the Dutch did Catholic missionaries find a real field of activity in the Indies. By 1875 the Catholic community had 14,000 people. An expansion began to islands such as Borneo, Sumatra and Southern Moluccas. This led to missionary successes comparable to those of the Protestants only by the 20th century[31].

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[26] Pancasila is a set of five principles: belief in one God, just and civilised humanity, unity of Indonesia, democracy, social justice. It was formulated in 1945 by Sukarno to bypass pressures to adopt Islam as the official state religion in favour of freedom of worship.

[27] This counts among the major carnages of this century in the world, leading to the killing of up to one million people by the Indonesian Armed forces and civilian supporters (many of which were Moslems).

[28] MPM Muskens, Partner..., p 38

The number of religious in the Netherlands East Indies rapidly increased after 1900, resulting in a continuous growth in the Catholic community. The government prohibition to Protestants and Catholics to work in the same regions did, however, constrain Catholic missionary work. This situation was only relaxed shortly before World War II. However, missionaries suffered greatly during the Japanese military occupation. Nonetheless, the Church played an important role in education and as such was a factor influencing the subsequent development of an educated nationalist elite.

A highly respected Dutch priest and educator, Father van Lith, was even appointed to the People's Council after its creation in 1918. In the 1920s a Catholic Political Party was formed, which eventually led to two parties, one defending the interests of Dutch Catholic residents and one defending those of the indigenous Catholics. Father Van Lith took the indigenous side and had a strong formative influence on Sukarno, and on Kasimo, the most prominent of the early Catholic nationalists. Nationalist cooperation with Catholic religious earned the strong suspicion of moslem sectors, a fact exacerbated by the active missionary work taking place in the 1930s. In 1940, two years before the end of Dutch rule, the first indigenous bishop was appointed in the Netherlands East Indies: Bishop Sugyapranata, of the newly created Diocese of Semarang.

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[29] Stephen Neill, A History..., p 347

[30] S. Neill, A History..., p 418

[31] ibid., p 418

After the collapse of Japanese rule, unlike the situation in other Asian colonies where Catholics tended to support the colonial powers, Catholics in the Netherlands East Indies continued their previous strong support of the nationalist pro-independence forces throughout the 1940s[32].

Indonesian political history

The Japanese occupation years, and the subsequent years of struggle against the attempted return to colonial domination by the Dutch, proved years of extreme violence in Indonesia. The key role played by emergent Armed Forces, ABRI,in thwarting the Dutch return, gave this institution a claim to demand a strong and privileged position in Indonesian social and political life. This position of predominance became even stronger after the 1965 coup.

Attending to Indonesia's cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, the Netherlands East Indies were granted independence by the Dutch as a federation, the 'United States of Indonesia'. It was argued that this constitutional form would better suit the variety of regional groups comprising the archipelago's population. Centralising nationalist elites strongly objected to this structure, and succeeded in abolishing it within one year, replacing it with the Unitary Republic of Indonesia. With Sukarno as President, the Republic maintained a lively pluralist parliamentary democracy until 1959. In that year, Sukarno imposed his so-called 'Guided Democracy' in response to increasing parliamentary anarchy and serious regional challenges to national unity. Endemic corruption, nepotism and a deficient justice system,-partly the result of the process of adaptation of a traditional patrimonial society to a modern one, as well as serious regional imbalances favouring Java and detrimental to the peripheries, had brought Indonesia close to disintegration in the latter 1950s. Strong Presidential rule enabled Sukarno to intensify his intense anti-colonialist foreign policy. At the height of the 'Cold-War' years, Sukarno took an increasingly hostile stance to the western block, approaching the Communist states while championing the cause of

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[32] 'Indonesia', INFO on human development, Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences, VI II, N° 2, February 1984, p 2

'non-alignment'. His foreign policy adventures became increasing worrisome to western powers, including Australia.

Sukarno's poor sense of economic management, his alienation of the capitalist west, his strong economic nationalism and prevalent corruption, brought the Indonesian economy into a disastrous shape, bringing much suffering to the Indonesian population. To maintain his popularity, and balance off the military, Sukarno resorted to a populist leadership style which allowed the Indonesian Communist Party to gather strength until it became the largest in the world. This caused much apprehension in the West and eventually also in ABRI. Expansionist drives into neighbouring remnants of European empires, such as the campaign to gain (or "recover" in Indonesian discourse) Dutch New Guinea, called Irian Barat, and "crush" Malaysia, further alarmed Western powers. It is notable, however, that at no time was the remnant of the Portuguese Empire in Timor claimed or disputed in any way[33].

The above developments led to the 1965 coup and the establishment of the strongly authoritarian, military dominated, fiercely anti-Communist, economically developmentalist Suharto regime, which has ruled Indonesia ever since. Support by Western powers has been the underpinning factor for Suharto's 'New Order'. Western powers have consistently ignored and sought to excuse the government's dubious domestic political legitimacy, the horrendous loss of life that brought it to power, its consistent history of human rights violations, the continuous domestic repression of critics, massive official corruption, and its strong Javanese ethnocentricity.

Given the trauma of the Sukarno years, and the highly profitable market 'New Order' Indonesia has become for international investors, traders and finance institutions, most foreign governments holding economic or security stakes in Indonesia go to great lengths to assist the Suharto government to protect itself from international criticism. Support takes the form of condoning or aiding disinformation and lobby campaigns at international fora, and the supply of massive funds as development loans through bilateral or multilateral funding institutions. Indonesia's most blatant infringement of international law and the United Nation's Charter, i.e. its invasion of East Timor, has been widely condoned by Indonesia's international supporters. Even the Vatican can not be excepted from the long list of states who have consistently sacrificed principle to pragmatic realism in this regard.

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[33] Even more surprising for the fact that Indonesia as a champion of anti-colonialism, led the bitter UN campaign against Portuguese African imperialism. It is suggested that Portuguese Timor was ignored as a result of requests by Sukarno's Chinese allies, desirous for the temporary maintenance of the status quo of Macao, which served their interests.

Indonesia and East Timor: invasion and aftermath

Indonesian nationalists never laid territorial claims to any bordering areas outside the boundaries of the Netherlands East Indies. That the legitimate boundaries of the Indonesian Republic included only those areas which had formed part of the Indies was repeatedly stated after 1949, especially as part of the strong decade-long campaign to gain control over Dutch New Guinea, not included in the 1949 independence agreement. Occasional arguments, presenting claims based of past pre-european tributary links between native Java or Sumatra-based kingdoms and peoples in areas outside subsequent Dutch rule were dismissed by Indonesian leaders. This applied unequivocally to East Timor during the Sukarno years and the early part of the Suharto presidency.

Official contacts between Jakarta and Dili were minimal during the 1950s and 1960s. Anti colonialist Sukarno was ideologically very distant from Salazar. Suharto's priorities were economic development, and the Portuguese maintained a very isolationist foreign policy, particularly with regards to Timor and its surrounding region. Similarly, virtually no contacts existed between the peoples of Indonesian West Timor and those of Portuguese Timor up to the 1970s. Ethnic and linguistic differences between the indigenous populations, the historic legacy of colonial political, cultural and religious separation, the Luso-centric and Sino-centric attitudes respectively of the main sectors of the modern urban population, the low level of economic development of Eastern Indonesia, and the generally negative image Indonesia's turbulent social, political and economic history since independence, as well as the strong Islamic presence in Indonesia, deterred the people of Portuguese Timor from interacting with their Indonesian neighbours. A startling isolation of Portuguese Timor from the Indonesian milieu it is geographically embedded in existed. On both sides, and particularly in Portuguese Timor, predominantly negative views and stereotypes about the other side were held[34].

Catholics in Flores and West Timor had increasing reason to be concerned about Indonesian developments in the latter part of the Sukarno years. Growing centralism, authoritarianism, Islamic assertiveness and communist ascendancy, fostered a sense of increased marginalisation in national affairs among them. Despite being a majority of the Indonesian Catholic population,

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[34] Author's personal observations, 1973 and 1974

Catholics from the 'Nusa Tenggara Timur' (NTT) Province (comprising Flores West Timor), were far less influential on the national scene than Catholics from Western Indonesia[35]. This led some NTT Catholic leaders to consider integration of Portuguese Timor Catholics into Indonesia as being convenient to their own interests. Perceived as 'close brothers', they would help increase East Indonesian Catholic strength. A Catholic ABRI member, who eventually became a highly respected and influential NTT Governor from 1978 to 1988, Dr. (later General) Benjamin Aloysius Mboi, acknowledged his active lobbying, together with a group of peers, for the peaceful absorption of Portuguese Timor into Indonesia, in agreement with the Portuguese Government[36].

According to Mboi, since Portugal needed to fully concentrate its resources on controlling its increasing problems in Africa, the Portuguese Government asked the Bishop of Dili in 1965 to approach Indonesian Bishops to see how Timor could be disposed of. Portugal had assessed several scenarios, from Timorese independence to integration with Mozambique or Macao, simultaneously attempting not to weaken the legitimacy claimed for its African colonial presence. The most favoured scenario was integration with Indonesia. Mboi, who had joined the bishop's meeting went to Jakarta on 12 March 1966, the day after the transfer of power from Sukarno to Suharto, to inform the new leader. Suharto was against annexing Portuguese Timor, fearing it would jeopardise the 1963 Irian Barat annexation, where a legitimising 'act of free choice' had still to take place.

Mboi provided a second evidence of Portugal's desire to get Indonesia to annex Portuguese Timor. He said that in 1971 Portugal's Ambassador to NATO told a friend of his (Mboi), the daughter of an Indonesian presidential adviser, that a the USSR was trying to obtain influence in Portuguese Timor so as to build up a base there. She told her father, who reported it to Suharto. It greatly alarmed the staunchly anti-communist regime. Feeling the annexation of Portuguese Timor to be imminent, a number of prominent NTT people, including Mboi and his eventual successor as NTT governor, Catholic Dr Fernandes, began to learn Portuguese for eventual service in East Timor. After the 1974 Lisbon coup, these people speedily proclaimed the integration of East Timor into Indonesia, but were reprimanded by Jakarta for interfering in foreign policy matters[37].

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[35] According to the 1971 census, out of a total of 2,545,803 Indonesian Catholics, 1,194,510 were from the Ecclesiastical Province of Nusa Tenggara Timur. The next largest Ecclesiastical Province, Central and East Java, had only 377,873 Catholics (MPM Muskens, Partner in..., p 95).

[36] Personal communication, Jakarta January 1992

The 'Carnation Revolution' also attracted Jakarta's attention. Ben Mang Rang Say of Flores, a prominent former Indonesian Catholic Party parliamentarian and associate of its leader Kasimo, was appointed as the first Indonesian Ambassador to Lisbon in late 1974. At this time, the Vatican had already begun to take a favourable stance to the possible integration of Portuguese Timor into Indonesia. The Pro-Nuncio in Jakarta assured the Portuguese Bishop of Dili that "the Chuch has nothing to fear from integration with Indonesia"[38].

In Portuguese Timor the new political freedom, aimed at developing the bases for a future democratic representative government, led to the emergence of three main political parties. The conservative mainly mestizo population grouped under UDT, whose platform was gradual independence maintaining close links with Portugal. The reformist and nationalist ASDT, later named Fretilin, espoused a social democratic ideology, and advocated early independence and a fundamental program of social reform. It had a populist approach, aimed at mobilising the so far marginalised native rural masses, strengthening the autochthonous identity, symbolised by the term 'Maubere', the pejorative used by the lusophone local elite to express their disdain for the majority not acculturated into Portuguese civilisation. A third, and very small grouping, Apodeti, advocated integration into Indonesia. Its constituency comprised some chiefs from the border with West Timor, and some Arab moslem traders.

Both UDT and Fretilin leaders were drawn from the more educated classes, primarily the products of Catholic schools. Among Fretilin's leadership, Catholics were dominant. Both its president Xavier do Amaral and vice-president Nicolau Lobato had studied at the Jesuit Seminary. Xavier do Amaral had even trained for the priesthood in Macao. Both aimed for an independent

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[37] Mboi, personal communication, Jakarta, January 1992

[38] Peace is Possible in East Timor, 'The Church in East Timor, voice of a silenced people', reg.easttimor, 29/08/94

East Timor to be a Catholic nation[39]. Unfortunately for the future Fretilin image, a few influential Marxists were also in middle decision-making roles of the party. They succeeded in introducing a number of Marxist trappings, allowing Fretilin opponents to label the party 'communist'.

UDT and Fretilin represented opposite sides along most of the main cleavage dimensions of Portuguese Timorese society, i.e culturally, economically, and ideologically. Conservative UDT members, not used to having their privileged position in colonial society challenged by 'primitive natives' led by leftist radicals, soon began to call Fretilin 'communist', a term which had carried great stigma under Salazar, and still did in Suharto's Indonesia. Conservative Portuguese Church authorities, particularly the Bishop, tended to share this perception of Fretilin, showing great hostility to it, in line with Papal teachings forbidding any Catholic-communist cooperation. Conversely, the new Portuguese government authorities sympathised with Fretilin rather than with UDT.

Indonesia, increasingly alarmed at the dangerous influence the example of political opening in the colony and the strong advances of Fretilin could have on its own oppressed eastern provinces, began intervening in Portuguese Timor's political scene, supporting the development of Apodeti through financial assistance and other means. By late 1974 Indonesian intervention had escalated to, among others, strong propaganda campaigns radioed from Kupang, warning the Catholic population about the dangers of supporting 'communist' Fretilin. Apodeti members were invited to West Timor for military training. Yet, while undermining the Timorese political process, Jakarta gave assurances to the young East Timorese leaders that independence was their right and would be scrupulously respected by Indonesia[40].

Internationally, Indonesian diplomacy tried to convince Western powers that a 'communist' East Timor was a danger to them all. Australia's Prime Minister Whitlam was easily convinced. So was the US Government, who depended on the strategic deep ocean passage off East Timor to link its Pacific and Indian Ocean submarine fleet. Portuguese governments remained immune to

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[39] B. Nicol, Timor, the stillborn..., p 94, 102

[40] See Indonesian Foreign Minister Adam Malik's letter to Jose Ramos Horta, June 1974. In J. Ramos Horta, Funu,

Indonesian attempts to deliver East Timor to Jakarta without the agreement of its own population.

By early 1975, under the leadership of highly efficient and ruthless military security officer, the Javanese Catholic Benny Murdani, closely connected to NTT Catholic leaders, Indonesia intensified its political intervention in East Timor. The 'Operasi Komodo' campaign was launched under Murdani in association with the Catholic intelligentsia gathered in the Jakarta 'Centre for Strategic and International Studies' (CSIS). Feeling increasingly threatened, East Timorese in UDT and Fretilin formed a coalition against Apodeti. Coopting the UDT Vice President, ex-seminarian Francisco Lopes da Cruz, to support its 'efforts to protect East Timor from falling prey to communism', Murdani and his team were able to create a civil war in East Timor. They incited UDT to launch a coup in August 1975 'to interrupt the colonial government's moves to hand power to the Fretilin communists'.

The coup led to the flight of the colonial government from Dili to the off shore island of Atauro. Fretilin struck back, and defeated UDT, many of whose adherents fled across the border into West Timor. This provided the excuse for Indonesian military intervention, which began covertly in late September. Indonesian military actions were, from the outset remarkable for their indiscriminate brutality against the innocent civilian population. Western governments, aware of the aggression begun by Indonesia chose to ignore it. Pleas for help from Portugal to the international community for assistance to resolve the situation, since given its own internal political turmoil at the time Lisbon was unable to do, remained unanswered. The Vatican also made no pronouncement.

Faced with increasing Indonesian military pressure, Fretilin unilaterally declared East Timorese independence on 29 November 1975 to gain international attention. Only a handful of countries, mostly of the Soviet or Chinese block recognised it. After extracting a so-called 'integration petition' from the UDT refugees on its soil, Indonesia commenced a full-scale invasion of the territory, on 7 December 1975, the day after the visit to Jakarta of US President Gerald Ford and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Indonesia's assault on East Timor has been called one of this century's great crimes against humanity. Conservative figures released by Jim Dunn, who has extensively researched the matter, put the victims of Indonesian aggression at over 200,000 dead, roughly one third of the population[41]. Part of the suffering has been caused by the oppressive and violent nature of Indonesian society, and the indiscipline and corruption of the armed forces and the civilian administration, compounded by a strong Javanese ethnocentrism and sense of regional entitlement. A biased lack of understanding of the East Timorese reality, resulting from gross manipulation of information, to suit the agenda of the primarily Catholic intelligence and disinformation bodies under Murdani in the military and the CSIS, further aggravated the situation. As a result, soldiers were indoctrinated to believe that all East Timorese were communists and deserved the treatment previously given to communists in Indonesia, i.e. extermination. Moslem soldiers were also encouraged to seek 'holy war' merit by exterminating East Timorese Christian infidels. Following a petition of integration passed by a puppet local legislative assembly set up in Dili by Indonesia, which Jakarta claimed represented a genuine act of self-determination, the Indonesian parliament approved East Timor's integration as the 27th province of the Republic in July 1976.

The violence against East Timor society, which has reached genocidal proportions, was exacerbated by international complacency, giving Indonesian leaders the security that their excesses would be accepted with impunity. The UN General Assembly passed a resolution in December 1975 deploring the Indonesian aggression and asking for respect of the East Timorese people's right of self-determination. The Security Council followed suit with two similar resolutions demanding Indonesian troop withdrawals. A total of eight General Assembly resolutions followed.They became progressively weaker as a result of diplomatic support for Jakarta by its Western allies such as the US and Australia[42].

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[41] J. Dunn, Timor....,

[42] Former US Ambassador to the UN, Daniel Moynihan (a Catholic), openly acknowledged in his memoirs his deliberate efforts to make UN efforts against Indonesia ineffective. (Daniel Moynihan, A Dangerous Place,).

Indonesian Catholics also played key roles in Jakarta's diplomatic propaganda efforts. The prominent Florenese Frans Seda, who had succeeded Kasimo as head of the Catholic Party, and who held Cabinet positions both under Sukarno and Suharto, became an important agent in Indonesia's campaign to silence opposition to its East Timor invasion. Seda entertained close relations with the Vatican Pronunciature in Jakarta, feeding Pro Nuncii and their guests, Indonesian disinformation about the "anti-communist Indonesian crusade in East Timor"[43]. Seda has subsequently concentrated on using his political influence to amass great wealth (primarily out of his NTT and East Timor opportunities). He was also appointed by the Vatican's Pontifical Commission Justicia et Pax as one of the delegates for the Asia Pacific region. This allowed him to play an insider role on behalf of Jakarta to check Church criticism of Indonesia's East Timor aggression. Using the authority (and often the facilities) of his Justicia et Pax position, Seda actively participated at Catholic justice and peace meetings the world over attempting to mute anti-Indonesian positions[44].

Given these conspiracies, which also extended to manipulation of western media to influence public opinion, the East Timor issue progressively receded from the international agenda[45]. Outstanding UN resolutions are still waiting to be implemented.

The tight control on the flow of information out of East Timor by the Indonesian authorities, and an active Indonesian diplomatic campaign of trading off access to prospective profitable business opportunities for support for its East Timor position, greatly helped to dampen the issue. By the end of the 1970s little was heard about the drama the East Timorese were experiencing in their prison homeland under Indonesian military occupation. Indonesian propaganda claimed that all was well, and that East Timorese were happily integrating. Australia even extended 'de facto' recognition of the annexation as early as January 1978, followed by 'de jure' recognition in December 1978, remaining the only government in the world to do so[46]. The Vatican, the

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[43] Personal experience, ca. 1976

[44] For example, his interventions at a PPHD Assembly in New Zealand, October 1988.

[45] See for example Noam Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent:the political economy of mass media, (New York, Pantheon, 1988)

[46] This enabled it to negotiate an agreement with Indonesia to exploit rich oil reserves off the East Timorese coast

Portuguese, Indonesian and Australian Catholic Churches also joined with most states in virtually ignoring the drama taking place in East Timor. Non government organisations, opposition political groups, human rights bodies, trade unions, academics, selected journalists, some Church members and a few (mostly non-Catholic) Church bodies plus some dedicated individuals did, however, continue to protest against the enormous injustices taking place in East Timor, keeping the issue from being totally forgotten. On occasion a few references about the plight of the East Timorese were published. Information came from refugee reports or from the few letters missionaries were able to smuggle abroad.

By the early 1980s, the patience of the Apostolic Administrator of the Dili Diocese had reached an end. In charge of the only agency with some degree of freedom in the territory, Mgr Martinho da Costa Lopes began denouncing the terror his people had been subjected to since 1975. This, as seen below, was the first of two turning points in the history of occupied East Timor, in both of which the Catholic Church has played a central role.

Church responses

Catholic Church responses outside East Timor to the unjust actions perpetrated by Indonesia against the East Timorese people have generally been very limited, particularly in early post invasion years, when the East Timorese were subjected to the strongest Indonesian military violence. This applies to Vatican policy as well as to the bishops conferences in those countries with closest links with East Timor such as Portugal, Australia, Japan and Western European countries such as the Netherlands. The responses of non-Catholic Churches have tended to be stronger. Catholic positions on East Timor have by no means been uniform, however. Many particular groups within the Church have taken stronger critical positions to those of their episcopal conferences. Such divergences mirror those differences in positions on the issue existing between lay support groups and their respective governments. In both cases these divergences have led to tensions in their respective societies.

Of particular interest is the case of relations between the Church of East Timor and the Vatican, and corollaries such as relations between the East Timor and Indonesian Churches and the Vatican and the Indonesian government.

The East Timor Church

The last Portuguese Bishop of Dili, Ribeiro, like many of his clergy, initially felt more opposed to 'communist' Fretilin than to the invading Indonesians. By early 1976, however, he was already strongly protesting to ABRI officers that their "troops with their murdering, looting and raping are a thousand times worse"[47]. Faced with this situation, East Timorese people increasingly turned to Catholic priests and nuns for solace and support against the invader. Some priests even joined the population which fled to Fretilin controlled zones in the interior. Portuguese missionary, Fr. Leoneto de Rego put their number at six, including two native Timorese[48]. Showing his acceptance, the Apostolic Administrator of Dili, Mgr da Costa Lopes pointed out that Fretilin people had a Catholic formation, many had attended Catholic seminaries, and fight for their independence. He added that "there is nothing wrong about it"[49]. His courageous attitude to provide support to the East Timorese had a key influence in the enormous growth in Catholic Church membership in East Timor in the late 1970s.

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[47] H. Hull, East Timor..., p 10

[48] 'Timor- Un genocide culturel', Informations Catholiques Internationales, N° 167, August 1982, pp. 16-19

Instead of using its influence to support integration, as desired of him by the Indonesian bishops conference and the Apostolic Pro-nuncio in Jakarta, Mgr Pablo Puente, Mgr da Costa Lopes became an increasingly outspoken critic of Indonesian excesses after 1981[50]. Speaking in Melbourne in 1983, after being pressed to resign from his position by the Vatican pro-Nuncio whose main concern had been to try to preserve good relations with Jakarta, Mgr da Costa Lopes said that for five years the East Timor Church had remained silent of the Indonesian abuses. It took them up privately with Indonesian military leaders, yet to no avail[51]. Thus in 1981 Mgr da Costa Lopes decided to begin public denunciation of the situation, in particular the forced conscription by the Indonesian military of 50,000 men to help crush the Fretilin resistance. Reacting to reprimands by the Indonesian military commander for denouncing Indonesian army crimes, particularly a massacre of 500 women and children at Mount Santo Antonio, Mgr da Costa Lopes said

> I feel the irrepressible need to tell the whole world about the genocide being practiced in Timor so that, when we die, at least the world will know we died standing[52].

President Suharto was infuriated by the Bishop's stance and veiled threats were made to the Vatican[53].

East Timorese priests and nuns also expressed their grievances more directly. In 1981 they wrote Indonesian Church colleagues that the Indonesian Army had invaded, carried out war, looted, destroyed the indigenous population,...., replaced the indigenous population by that of immigrants from other islands, and attempted mass mobilisation of people to make war on each other[54]. Adding that it was impossible to construct justice with the current Indonesian government, the religious express regret at having, together with their people, been isolated from the world, and "suddenly thrown into emptiness and alienation...until [they] became the silent Church of East Timor". The letter ends stating their awareness that they are being 'persuaded' to develop close relations with the Indonesian Church which enjoys government and army support. The religious finalise their letter stating their lack of understanding and deep affliction by the silence of the Indonesian and Universal Roman Churches not to state officially and openly their solidarity with the Church, people and religious of East Timor, thus seeming to allow them to die deserted. To prospective critics who might accuse them of meddling in political affairs, they said

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[49] Ibid.

[50] 'Timor, les Catholiques victimes des ambitions Indonesiennes', L'Actualite Religieuse dans le Monde, N°2, 15/6/1983, pp 20-21

[51] 'East Timor has a voice', Asia Bureau Australia Bulletin, N° 71, October 1983, p 3

[52] Written testimony of Mgr Da Costa Lopes, Peace is Possible in East Timor, 'The Church in East Timor-voice of a silenced people', reg.easttimor, 29/08/94

[53] G. Hull, East Timor..., p 12.

> only a Church which practices the faith of its people and is capable of expressing what its people feels, lives and suffers is a living Church[55]

The extent of the collusion of the Indonesian Catholic Church with the Suharto regime had not yet been fully grasped in East Timor. The lack of clear Vatican support for the East Timorese Church was a source of profound distress to its members.

By late 1981, wondering why the Vatican made no pronouncements on the East Timor situation, and assuming it could only be due to misinformation supplied by the Jakarta Pro-nuncio, Mgr da Costa Lopes wrote a personal letter to the Pope, asking for a special audience. The Vatican responded that the audience was neither timely nor necessary. For Mgr da Costa Lopes this was one of his hardest blows. His popularity with the Indonesian authorities, the Indonesian bishops, and the Vatican suffered even further with the publication of a letter written in late 1981, in which the Apostolic Administrator replied to Australian Catholic Relief questions about the health and food situation in East Timor. Accusing the Indonesian military of mass murder, Mgr da Costa Lopes, correctly as it became evident later, anticipated widespread hunger unless large food supplies were urgently imported[56]. Publication of the letter in Australia produced harsh criticism from Indonesian authorities. Australian former Prime Minister Whitlam, called the bishop a "liar, who was simply stirring up trouble"[57]. Mgr da Costa Lopes' unjust removal was greatly regretted in East Timor, prompting even one hundred East Timorese Catholics to write Pope John Paul II demanding this not to be done. Notwithstanding, Mgr da Costa Lopes was forced to leave Dili in mid 1983. The pro-Nuncio in Jakarta was overjoyed[58].

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[54] Letter to Conference of Major Religious Superiors in 1981. The Church and East Timor, Just Reading N° 2, (Catholic Commission for Justice, Development and Peace, Melbourne Archdiocesse, p 14)

[55] Ibid.

[56] The American Catholic Relief Service program director for East Timor commented that the degree of undernourishment was the worst he had seen anywhere in his 14 years of experience. 'Timor Oriental: génocide physique, culturel et religieux', Eglise et Mission, N° 229,

At the age of 35, the East Timorese Salesian Priest, Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, was chosen in 1983 as the next Apostolic Administrator of Dili. Reputedly a flexible and moderate person, he wished to return to serve in his homeland after a 13 year study absence in Portugal. He accepted Mgr Puente's advice to return via Jakarta, where he had to take on Indonesian citizenship in order to be accepted as a missionary to East Timor. Great hopes were held by the Pro Nuncio and the Indonesian bishops that under Belo's leadership the East Timor Church would be more docile and accepting of integration with Indonesia.

Mgr Belo's public stance was indeed initially less critical on the ongoing crimes of the Indonesian military and the repressive nature of the Indonesian administration. In private, he deplored the worsening situation. In a letter to his predecessor, he asked Mgr da Costa Lopes to "launch an appeal to the free world to open its eyes to the barbarities of which the Indonesians are capable"[59]. But Belo's 'silent diplomacy', proving as ineffective as that of his predecessor, did not last past the first year of his appointment. In early 1984 he delivered a sermon in Dili's cathedral denouncing Indonesian military brutalities[60]. In 1985 Mgr Belo, together with his diocesan council of priests wrote a statement to appeal to the Indonesian Government to respect fundamental human rights,

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March 1983, p 29. But, as the National Catholic Reporter (v 18, N° 27, 7/05/82) commented, CRS, whose aid for East Timor is mostly funded by the US Government, remained silent on the issue. Even more, CRS Indonesia Director publicly denied famine in East Timor, discrediting Mgr da Costa Lopes. This,the paper commented, revived charges that CRS in East Timor serves the interests of the US and Indonesia, not the Church. CRS is portrayed as a quasi-governmental agency, to channel US government funds to the Indonesian government.

[57] 'East Timor has...', Asia Bureau Australia Bulletin, N° 71, October 1983, p 3

[58] Personal observation, mid 1983. Mgr Puente was exultant during a luncheon gathering the day after Mgr da Costa Lopes' left for Rome.

[59] Letter written in late 1983. The Church and ..., p 16

[60] National Outlook, Vol 12, N° 5, July 1990, p 4

and ethnic, cultural, and religious identity of the people of East Timor. Mgr Belo later denied authorship, presumably following Indonesian threats[61]. By 1986 he was openly accusing Indonesia military of numerous atrocities in interviews with a group of foreign journalists, among the very few allowed to visit East Timor[62]. The military attempted to discredit his statements. In 1987, Mgr Belo took the extremely defiant action of instructing all religious in East Timor to boycott government run education courses in Pancasila in protest at beatings of priests by Indonesian soldiers[63]. In June 1988 during his ordination ceremony as bishop (of Lorium), Mgr Belo ordered Indonesian military members who had started to raise an Indonesian flag to replace it with a Vatican flag[64] .

The international conspiracy of silence towards the tribulations of the East Timorese included the Vatican. In February 1989 Bishop Belo wrote directly to the Secretary General of the United Nations appealing for a genuine and democratic process of decolonisation to be begun, stating that the East Timorese believed they should be consulted about the future of their land. The Bishop added, "we are dying as a people and as a nation"[65]. The Apostolic Pro Nuncio in Jakarta claimed that the letter was a personal position statement, unrepresentative of the East Timorese Church's view, or of that of the East Timorese people[66]. The President of the Indonesian Bishop's Conference (KWI) argued similarly, that the letter was personal and not on behalf of the Catholic population, noting that it also did not reflect the views of Indonesian bishops[67]. In response, Bishop Belo showed his increasing indignation at the ongoing human rights violations in East Timor, the barbaric system implanted and the lies denying the violations taking place[68]. The East Timorese clergy, in an open letter to the Pro Nuncio in Jakarta openly stated that the Bishop spoke for them, adding that they "refute the biased views and suggestions expressed by certain ecclesiastical personalities"[69].

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[61] 'Church shares people's pain', IDOC Internazionale, Vol 18, N° 1, January/February 1987

[62] 'Journalists in East Timor hear different accounts', Impact, Vol. 21, N° 10-11, Oct/Nov. 1986

[63] 'East Timor Church to boycott Pancasila Seminar', Impact, Vol 22, N° 3, March 1987

[64] Eglises d'Asie N° 62, 1/5/89.

[65] Letter by Bishop Belo to UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar, February 1989. The Church and ..., p 8

[66] National Outlook, Vol 11, N° 5, 1989

[67] 'East Timor: religion and politics', Social and Pastoral Bulletin, (Tokyo, Jesuit Social Centre, N° 33, 15/10/89, p 14).

[68] Eglises d'Asie N° 59, 16/3/89

In October 1989, a highly significant if brief Papal visit to Dili, which was widely interpreted as a sign of acceptance of Indonesia's annexation of East Timor, allowed the world a glimpse of the tense reality in the territory[70]. Despite the tightest of security controls, a group of about 20 youths (many of which students at a Salesian-run institute) demonstrated their rejection of Indonesian occupation after the Papal mass. They were brutally dealt with by security forces, in full view of Pope John Paul II and his entourage. Strong retaliation by the Indonesian military followed, including arrests, torture, imprisonment and other victimisation. Accusations of Church involvement in the organisation of the action were also made[71]. This was the beginning of a wave of demonstrations by East Timorese youth which would lead to the Santa Cruz massacre two years later. This event brought a turning point in the situation. Otherwise the Papal visit itself did little to support the East Timorese hopes for justice. Observers agreed that instead the visit had strengthened the Indonesian position, despite Pope John Paul's acknowledgment in his homily of the suffering of the people and the human rights violations taking place[72].

Despite his courageous position, which allowed the East Timorese Church to become a refuge for the East Timorese from the military and cultural onslaught of Indonesia, and therefore to grow significantly in numbers, Mgr Belo was criticised by members of his Church for his sometimes too conciliatory position. For example, as the frustration of the East Timorese with their situation led to increasing youth assertiveness after the Papal visit, Bishop Belo issued a Pastoral letter in December 1989 asking people to refrain from protests and all acts aimed at inciting such actions among the youth[73]. This, and other similar moves aimed at reducing tensions with the Indonesian authorities, earned Bishop Belo the criticism of the native clergy.

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[69] Collective letter from priests of Diocese of Dili, July 1989.

[70] G. Hull, East Timor..., p 14

[71] IMPACT, Vol 25, N° 5, May 1990, p 6

[72] 'The visit of Pope John Paul II to Indonesia, 9-14 October 1989', Exchange, Vol 18, N° 54, December 1989, p 54

[73] Eglises d'Asie, N° 81, 16/2/90, p 11

Out of the twenty or so native priests in the territory, 16 signed a 'Reflection of native priests', made public in Lisbon in September 1990. Acknowledging the bishop's difficult position,they reproached his policy contradictions in public and pastoral matters, which, they felt, could only benefit Indonesia. Among others, they criticised the leniency shown towards Indonesian priests. For example, despite Tetum having been declared official liturgical language, Indonesian priests were allowed to only use Indonesian. Similarly, diocesan priests were said to be subordinated to Indonesian religious, who did not sufficiently know about the Maubere people. The Indonesians were accused of showing their feeling of superiority over the local people, and favouring integration with Indonesia. The Jakarta Apostolic Nuncio's request that priests abstain from engaging in political acts was strongly criticised as hypocritical. Denouncing the injustices against the defenceless population was called 'engaging in political actions', while supporting an oppressive government authority was not[74]. East Timor's governor deplored the Reflection statement, indicating that only a few of the clergy held such destabilising views. The governor added that more priests should be brought from other Indonesian regions.

During 1991 the tensions in East Timor continued increasing, as a long planned and much awaited Portuguese parliamentary visit seemed finally about to take place. In late October Bishop Belo issued a pastoral letter prior to the event indicating the Church took no position on the visit, neither approving or disapproving of it. The Church was, however, concerned that the debate the visit was generating might be divisive, and break years of efforts for unity. The letter expressly asked priests to stay out of politics, adding that "the Church position is to accept the situation chosen by the people". Citing 'Gaudium & Spes', it said "the Church, due to its role and competence is not linked to any political system. She is the sign and guarantee of the transcendental dimension of the human person". Bishop Belo's letter concluded saying that the Church

> hopes that human rights will be respected and that an eventual solution of the East Timor problem will guarantee the legitimate interests of all concerned parties[75].

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[74] 'Une reflection des pretres autochtones', Eglises d'Asie, (Agence d'information des Missions Etrangeres de Paris, Nº 102, 1/01/91, p 13)

[75] Eglises d'Asie, Nº 119, 16/10/91, p 8

In October 1991 Indonesian military shot a youth inside Motael Church in Dili where he had sought refuge. This outrageous act further increased tensions, which culminated with the shooting of a procession of mourners of that victim at Dili's Santa Cruz cemetery on 12 November 1991. The fortuitous presence of foreign television journalists enabled the world to witness for the first time the brutality of Indonesia's rule in East Timor. Over 250 unarmed young people were murdered in cold blood, and many more disappeared. Initial Indonesian denials evidenced their habitual practice of lying about East Timor. The factual basis of the continuously sustained past criticisms by the East Timorese Church and its bishop could no longer be disputed. Public outrage compelled most Western governments to publicly condemn Indonesia, which they reluctantly did, while assisting their Jakarta clients to find devices to exonerate them from this latest crime. The Santa Cruz massacre does represent, however, the most significant turning point in the tragic East Timor saga so far.

The graphic evidence of Indonesia's brutality in East Timor seen by a world wide audience, did strengthen the credibility of those non-governmental sectors which had consistently presented allegations of this reality over the years since 1975. It prompted the emergence of a much wider base of pro- East Timor self-determination support groups all over the world. Significantly, the tragic event led the Vatican and episcopal conferences all over the world, including Indonesia and Australia, to reassess their position. Since the 'Santa Cruz massacre', as it has commonly become known, statements of defence of Indonesian presence in East Timor have been much more cautious, as its tenuous legitimacy became clearly evident.

This increase in international understanding of the East Timor reality, resulting in stronger non-governmental support and greater governmental caution in expressing unqualified support for the Indonesian presence in East Timor, has emboldened the stance taken by the East Timor Church and its Apostolic Administrator. Bishop Belo has made increasingly stronger statements denouncing human rights violations, the increasing Islamisation of East Timor, and the people's right of self determination. As a result the Church has become the rallying point for East Timorese nationalism, affording the people the only available protection from encroachment by Indonesia. After the capture of the much respected leader of the East Timorese nationalist resistance, Jose

'Xanana' Gusmao, Bishop Belo has found himself increasingly projected into the position of leader or 'father figure' of this still very paternalistic society.

By mid 1994 the situation had reached one of open confrontation between the Church and the Indonesian authorities, with the Church becoming one of the main foci of pro-independence sentiment, and being considered by the people as a key actor in the process of search for a political solution. In a July interview with the international media, Bishop Belo clearly summarised the position, when he said that the Church remained under siege under Indonesia's brutal rule, its members were harassed assaulted and sometimes killed by the hostile Indonesian military[76]. Bishop Belo was also being directly drawn into the process of search for a solution of the issue. He also reacted strongly to heightened deliberate Indonesian military provocation against East Timorese Catholics. These included desecration of Hosts at communion by moslem soldiers posing as Catholics, harassment of clergy and the insults to nuns at East Timor University on 14 July which led to violent student clashes with the military causing an unconfirmed number of deaths.

In video interviews with an Australian visitor Bishop Belo attacked the Indonesian presence in East Timor in the strongest of terms, calling for a genuine act of self-determination to allow the people to determine by themselves, free of outside pressure, the political status they desire for the territory. The Bishop also spoke harshly about Indonesian 'development' which was only physical, paying no attention to the development of the human being. He criticised human rights violations, especially the killings following the Santa Cruz massacre, which the Indonesians had attempted to deny, and active miliary involvement in intimidation of Church members and promotion of Islam[77]. The Bishop wrote strong letters of condemnation of the host desecration incident to the Commander in Chief of the Indonesian Armed Forces, with copies to President Suharto and 26 other Indonesian authorities[78]. In a statement released on 31 July the Bishop called for a referendum as the only solution to the East Timor problem, asking for autonomy until this becomes possible. He also offered the good offices of the Church to serve as a mediator in talks between the government and various East Timorese political groups, which the Bishop considers to be highly necessary. The statement also asked the Indonesian government to genuinely cooperate with the United Nations Secretary General in the search of a peaceful, just and internationally acceptable international solution to the East Timor issue[79]. Bishop Belo's offer to play a pivotal role in the political process of search for a solution received the immediate approval of the East Timorese Resistance, while the Jakarta government totally ignored it.

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[76] Interview with Reuters from Jakarta, reg.easttimor, 5 July 1994.

[77] Andrew McNaughtan, video interviews in Dili late July 1994, shown on ITN News, England, and BBC World Service in early August.

[78] Pemberitahuan dan Permintaan, 3 July 1994.

The Indonesian Church

The Catholic Church in Indonesia has been a strong supporter of the integration of East Timor as Indonesia's 27th province. This stance has been primarily one of political convenience, despite its injustice to the East Timorese. As mentioned above, East Indonesian Catholics saw it as a way to increase Catholic strength in the national context. Another factor is the generally submissive nature of the Indonesian Church to government authority, partly reflecting aspects of the local political culture, and partly due to the Church's sense of vulnerability, and the need to carefully protect its considerable interests and the privileged situation of many of its members in Indonesia. For the Indonesian Church, East Timor is considered a crucial issue which could decisively affect the Church's future in the country. A Jesuit mentioned that Catholics would be called to make some very real sacrifices if they were to oppose the government, adding "remember, we are not a heroic community. We are a cross section of society, weak and fearful like most people"[80]. An Indonesian Church spokesperson claimed in 1984 that the Indonesian Church is unfairly criticised for its silence on East Timor. Criticism would only make the situation worse between Church workers and the government[81].

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[79] 'The Document of the East Timor Catholic Church on East Timor Nowadays', open letter by Bishop Administrator of the Apostolic Diocese of Dili, dated 31/07/94.

[80] 'Indonesia', INFO on Human Development, (Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences, Vol 11, N° 2, February 1984, p 7

[81] Asia Bureau Australia, Newsletter , No 74, March 1984

The first open letter by Indonesian bishops to East Timorese clergy in the eight years since invasion, written in 1983, reflects the timidity of the Indonesian Church. Drawing on *Gaudium and Spes*, (76), the letter stresses that compassion with the suffering of their East Timorese brothers is in no way a political act[82]. To foreign criticisms of the letter, individual bishops replied that the Church had chosen 'Indonesian-style prophetic action' which is non confrontational. The Church action in favour of East Timor, it was said, had been ongoing for years, quietly contacting competent authorities[83]. Another bishop added that too strong a position would only bring reprisals, "we are only a weak minority Church...look at what happened in Egypt and Turkey"[84].

The Catholic Church is in fact not so lacking influence in Indonesia. Balancing itself between the military and Islam, it identifies closely with state and society, having, unlike Churches in other Asian countries, played a real and useful role in the independence struggle against the Dutch[85]. With regards to East Timor, the Church has clearly sought to play a role to enable it to enhance its power. The role of some of the key Catholic actors, both in the military and civilian efforts to consummate the annexation, has been referred to above. The Indonesian Church not only provided missionaries, education, and relief to assist government objectives, but is also cited as an agency for the Suharto government, supporting the Indonesian diplomatic efforts vis-a-vis the Vatican. One instance for example is the call on President Suharto by KWI President, Archbishop Darmaatmadja, together with other KWI leaders in May 1989, before his *ad limina* visit to Rome. Suharto asked them to do their utmost for the East Timorese Church to be attached to the Indonesian episcopal conference, a fact found totally normal by the Archbishop[86].

The Santa Cruz massacre did force the Indonesian Church to take a more critical position towards the conduct of the army in East Timor. While showing no indication of acknowledging the right of the East Timorese to self-determination, the softly worded episcopal statements on the massacre, called 'incident', do ask for investigation and punishment of those found guilty[87]. The massacre did however not cause too strong an impact on the more conservative and powerful sections of Indonesian catholics, who remained preoccupied by the need to preserve the long-term interests of the Church in Indonesia, and not take a too critical stance regarding government excesses[88].

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[82] The Church and..., p 18

[83] 'Les chrétiens les mieux intégrés d'Asie', L'Actualité Religieuse, N° 14, July-August 1984, p 39

[84] ibid.

[85] 'Indonesia', INFO on Human..., p 2

[86] Eglises d'Asie, No 62, 1/5/89, p 11

The massacre did, however, strengthen the position taken by the minority of Catholics who understand and have sympathy for East Timorese Church perspective. The Catholic Students Union of Indonesia issued a strong statement criticising the army for the shooting of innocents[89]. This signals the beginning of a process of growth in support among pro-democracy Indonesian circles for the East Timorese people and their struggle for self-determination, which has taken place since 1991. Prominent Catholic academics such as Dr George Aditjondro, and to a lesser extent Dr Arief Budiman, have taken great personal risks as a result of leading open attacks on the gross violations of human rights perpetrated by the Indonesian Armed Forces in East Timor since 1975, and the disastrous impact of Indonesia's annexation on the people of the territory[90]. It is, however, striking that the majority of prominent Indonesian human rights and pro-democracy activists who have taken up the cause of East Timorese right to self-determination are not Catholic, but Moslem or Protestant[91].

The Vatican

Faced with intense Indonesian pressures to accept the integration of East Timor into Indonesia, officially the Vatican policy has been one of not taking sides. Bishop Canallini, Pro Nuncio to Jakarta, acknowledging the desire of the Indonesian Government to have the Indonesian Bishops

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[87] Indonesian Episcopal Conference statement regarding East Timor events, 28 November 1991

[88] Personal interview with prominent Catholic dissident Chris Siner Key Timu, Jakarta February 1992

[89] Eglises d'Asie, N° 122, 1/12/91

[90] See G. Aditjondro, 'In the Shadow of Mount Ramelau', and 'From Memo to Tutuala', excerpts of which were published by the Australian press in March 1994. 'I'm no traitor: academic', The West Australian, 12 March 1994

[91] For example the membership of the 'Joint Committee for the Defence of the East Timorese' in Jakarta includes only one Catholic priest in addition to Dr Aditjondro.

Conference directly administer the Dili Diocese, said that the Vatican will not move until the issue is settled in international fora. After this the Holy See will follow without hesitation[92].

As Pro Mundi Vita wrote

> Official statements... have widely been used to assert that the Vatican supports the East Timorese cause, and, conversely, that it is ready to recognise the Indonesian annexation... The signals sent out by Rome,..., have been consistently ambiguous, allowing Portugal and the Indonesian government -as well as the Timorese and Indonesian Churches- to draw comfort for their point of view[93].

In reality, however, the Vatican has considered East Timor expendable in its efforts to retain good relations with the Indonesian government. This has been evident from the beginning, and has been a source of much pain to the profoundly religious East Timorese population. On the other hand, the Indonesian government has always been aware that the Vatican favoured an outcome agreeable to Indonesia[94]. However, the ambiguous position taken by the Vatican in its attempt to stay out of the political controversy, such as prolonging the status of the Diocese as an Apostolic Administration without the designation of a Dili Bishop and the non-inclusion of the Diocese in the Indonesian Episcopal Conference, has failed to satisfy either side[95].

Vatican efforts, including coercion, to convince Dili Bishops to accept integration have been referred to above. Jakarta- based Pro Nuncios have made little effort to hide their disinterest in the pleas of the East Timorese people for freedom and the respect of their human rights, including that of self-determination. For example, shortly after his appointment in 1987, the Pro Nuncio in Jakarta, praising what he claimed to be an improvement in the human rights situation in the territory is reported to have said that the ET situation involves two countries, which might best resolve the issue. The Pope will not intervene to speed up solving the issue[96]. No reference was made to the right of the East Timorese to decide their future for themselves.

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[92] Sunday Examiner, VXL, No 18, 5/05/89

[93] Pro Mundi Vita Studies, N°9, May 1989, p 8

[94] The Indonesian government hopes that the Vatican will recognise East Timor annexation, as soon as the balance shifts decisively in favour of Jakarta. PMV No 9, May 1989 p8

[95] 'Timor: una isla Cristiana en el mar del Islam', Pueblos del tercer Mundo, N°194, Mayo 1989, pp 19 21, p 21

Vatican 'realpolitik', like that of any state, has been based less on principle and the basic gospel call to protect the oppressed, but on the assumption that avoidance of denunciation of the human right violations perpetrated by the authoritarian Indonesian government would advance and protect Catholic interests in the country.

Besides the efforts of Pro Nuncios in Jakarta to convince the East Timorese to accept integration, the Vatican has also used its influence to curtail other members of the Church from challenging Indonesia. One particularly striking example was the ban imposed by the Apostolic Nuncio in Portugal on the Bishop of Setúbal, who enlisted the support of over 150 Bishops, Archbishops and Cardinals for Bishop Belo's appeal for a self-determination referendum for East Timor. The Bishop of Setúbal was forbidden to deliver a petition asking for this to the UN Secretary General in New York, and until 1992, banned from publicly intervening on East Timor[97].

Finally, the role of Pope John Paul II in relation to East Timor has also been very limited. It was made quite clear that his visit to East Timor in October 1989 would not change the status of the Church there. Pope John Paul has, however, expressed concern at the human rights situation in East Timor, without touching on the political status of the territory. When accepting credentials of the Indonesian Ambassador, General Sastrapoespita, in July 1984, the Pope referred to the preoccupation of the Holy See, hoping for particular consideration to be given "in every circumstance to the ethnic, political and cultural identity of the people"[98]. Receiving credentials of the next Indonesian Ambassador, Roni Kurniadi, in December 1987, His Holiness reaffirmed Vatican concerns and asked that "particular consideration be given to the protection of the ethnic, religious and cultural character of the East Timorese people"[99]. After the Santa Cruz massacre, widely condemned world wide, Papal statements on East Timor became even more rare.

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[96] Sunday Examiner, Vol XLI, No 42, 16/10/87

[97] Peace is Possible....., 'The Church in East....'

[98] Pro Mundi Vita, Nº9, May 1989, p 9

[99] ibid., note that the second statement is a weaker version of the first.

Catholic Churches in other countries

Mirroring the situation with the Vatican and Indonesian Churches, most Catholic bishops conferences remained relatively detached from the East Timor issue. In many cases, the Indonesian invasion was accepted as a way of containing 'communist Fretilin'. Over the years the tragic story of brutal Indonesian human rights violations became better known, in great measure due to the active work of East Timor solidarity groups, many of which were linked in varying degrees to the Catholic Church. It will not be possible to include a review of this aspect in this paper.

The Santa Cruz massacre did, however, have a turning point effect in Vatican policy as well as in Church policy many countries. The Vatican protested, stressing the fundamental rights of the East Timorese, in a stronger manner than Pope John Paul II had done during his visit to East Timor two years earlier[100]. Vatican policy henceforth no longer appears so actively seeking East Timor's integration into Indonesia, even if little open support for East Timorese self-determination is offered.

In Australia, a similar turning point was provided by the massacre. The Australian bishops raised strong protests, adding their weight to that of pro-East Timor support sectors in the Church, which had previously been the only ones really concerned with the issue. Individual Bishops, such as Bishop Hilton Deakin of Melbourne, and Australian Social Justice Council Chairman Bishop William Brennan began to take a high profile on the issue. In the past, extreme right wing influence in the Church had inhibited many from taking up such a 'leftist' cause. Other bishops, such as Bishop Aloisius Soma of Nagoya, Japan, and the late Bishop Patelisio Finau DJ Th. of Tonga, have addressed international political fora pressing for respect of East Timorese human rights including self-determination[101]. The US Bishops' Conference also issued statements and began to lobby the US Government of President Clinton in recent years.

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[100] Eglises d'Asie, N° 123, 16/12/1991

[101] Text of Bishop Finau's address to the UN Decolonisation Committee's session on East Timor, 12 August 1988, in Pacific Journal of Theology, Series II, No 11, 1994, p 49

Conclusion

The case of East Timor has been a particularly difficult foreign policy test for those states claiming to respect the upholding of human rights principles and norms in international relations. Most western states have yielded to the expediency of remaining on good terms with the military backed authoritarian government of President Suharto of Indonesia, turning a blind eye to the blatant violations of human rights taking place in East Timor, and ignoring the appeals for help from its predominantly Catholic population. The main motivation has been to protect lucrative commercial interests in Indonesia.

The Vatican has behaved no differently. It has chosen to virtually ignore the plight of its flock in East Timor, attempting to convince the East Timorese to accept the profound injustice of their forced incorporation into Indonesia. Instead of being motivated commercially as secular states tend to be, Vatican foreign policy has chosen to ignore the call of the weak and oppressed East Timorese, so as to remain on good terms with the Jakarta government, in an attempt to protect the Catholic minority of Indonesia. No initiatives of any consequence to contribute to finding a genuine resolution to the issue are evident on the part of the Vatican's diplomacy.

As has happened in many societies, the East Timor issue has had a divisive effect on the Catholic Church. While Rome has pursued a 'realpolitik', many individuals, both among the clergy and laity have played important roles in support of the just struggle of the East Timorese people for the exercise of their right of self-determination. As time progresses, and the East Timorese situation becomes increasingly critical, turning more and more into a Catholic versus Islam conflict, growing support is emerging among Indonesian Catholics, in opposition to the position of the hierarchy.

On the other hand, the hardship faced by the East Timorese population and the Church under Indonesian military occupation, has strengthened the East Timorese Church. Membership has greatly increased in recent years, as it is the refuge for Timorese determined to save their identity[102]. The Church is the only institution really concerned with the moral, physical and spiritual welfare of the East Timorese people. It is the champion of the people's rights and the focus of national identity[103].

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[102] Peuples du Monde, No 227, Nov 89, p 6

As a result, Church membership among the East Timorese population has grown from about 27% in the early 1970s to near 90% in the early 1990s[104]. Given this increasing strength of the Church, antagonism on the part of the Indonesian military authorities has grown, as they increasingly view the Church as their most significant opponent in East Timor. This has only served to strengthen the Church. The pressures and threats on its head, the courageous Bishop Dom Carlos Ximenes Belo, have similarly served to strengthen his leadership position of East Timorese society as a whole[105]. Another significant development is the increasing search for protection by East Timor Catholics of Catholics from West Timor and its Nusa Tenggara Province, who fear the increasing Islamic penetration fostered by the Indonesian authorities.

It can thus be seen that the Church derives its strength and ensures its future, not through a foreign policy based on rational calculations of convenience, but by being consistent with its mission, and truly identifying with the just aspirations and sufferings of its people.

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[103] G. Hull, East Timor...., p 13

[104] G. Neonbasu, Keadilan dan Perdamaian..., p 76, G. Hull, East Timor...., p 13.

[105] Bishop Belo is also a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994

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